



Equity response to the Treasury Select Committee Call for Evidence: Government response to the coronavirus crisis

Equity represents over 48,000 members who work as actors, stage managers, theatre directors and designers, live entertainers, dancers, singers, choreographers, audio artists and in many other creative professions across the arts, entertainment and media sectors.

Last week theatres and many other live entertainment venues went dark and film and TV productions across the country shut down. We don't know for how long these and many other workplaces will be closed or how many will re-open.

There is considerable anger and distress being expressed by Equity members and by many other creative practitioners following the Chancellor's announcements about the job retention scheme and the support measures for self-employed workers, to be delivered through the welfare regime.

With regard to the job retention scheme:

We believe that there are a number of performers and stage management currently engaged on conventional Equity contracts across the live and recorded media sectors which should be included in the job retention scheme. Many of these workers were effectively furloughed in the last few days and share many of the characteristics of those who are included in the 80% salary scheme. Together with engagers across the creative industries we urgently need clarity on this issue from the Government

And more generally with regards to the support proposed for self-employed and freelance workers:

- We believe no one should be left behind just because their employment is insecure. The vast majority of Equity members work on a series of short term contracts to maintain their 'portfolio' careers.
- Creatives, freelancers and self-employed workers deserve the same support and respect as employees in secure jobs. Our members are highly skilled professionals and it is not appropriate to equate their incomes to the welfare safety net, as the Chancellor seemed to suggest.
- £94 per week is not enough to live on, especially for the two thirds of Equity's members who live in London and the South East of England where living costs are considerably higher than the rest of the UK.
- The creative industries alone are worth £117bn to the economy and much of this success is predicated on the availability of a highly skilled workforce. If we want the UK's digital and creative economy to continue to survive and thrive we need an income guarantee for the people who work hard to deliver this success.

The Government needs to talk to unions representing creative and freelance workers now in order to safeguard creative skills and provide a real safety net for all workers.

We believe that the most appropriate model mooted so far for freelance and self-employed workers is the package offered by the Norwegian Government which takes the form of a temporary income protection, equivalent to 80% of the worker's average pay over the past three years – in the case of a freelance or self-employed worker the reference here being to their last 3 years tax returns.

If this proves to be too difficult to administer by HMRC, the very minimum level of support made available to freelance and self-employed workers should be based on the national minimum wage paid at full time hours.

If you require any further information with regard to this submission please contact:

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Equity